

Some fact and figures from 2018/19 and what our customers think



221

affordable homes delivered



642

participants in Forever Active schemes



over

200

participants in Social Prescribing scheme



277

households prevented from becoming homeless



22kg

less waste produced per household than last year



Top 5 pages:

- Planning portal (to make comments on a planning application or decision)
- Planning
- Council Tax
- Bins/waste/recycling
- Waste collection calendars



2,263,981

visits to our website since it launched in May 2017

Annual Report for 2018/19

Update from Cllr Linda Haysey, Leader of the Council

2018/19 has been another dynamic and productive year in East Herts. Councillors have built on the successes of previous years and we continue with our forward-thinking and progressive approach to providing high quality services for residents.

The East Herts District Plan was adopted in October 2018, and sets out our vision for ambitious and sustainable growth in the district through new homes, jobs, facilities and infrastructure. The Plan will help us to support the local economy by ensuring that the right land is available at the right times for development and infrastructure. It sets out our resolve to deliver 18,000 new dwellings for the district by 2033. This will be done through new sites at Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, to the north of Harlow; Gresley Park, to the east of Stevenage; and Birchall Garden Suburb, to the east of Welwyn Garden City. We recognise the difficulties that many young people in East Herts face in getting on the housing ladder in their neighbourhoods. We have provided 221 affordable homes this year, significantly above our target of 140. This is the highest number of affordable homes completed in a single year in the district since 2006/07. We are working closely with neighbouring councils and developers to ensure that the rural character of our district is preserved and that the quality of our natural environment is protected and enhanced.

We have made significant progress in planning for improvements to our town centres, and the redevelopment of important urban sites. In Hertford, we have carried out extensive improvements on The Wash, Bull Plain and Maidenhead Street, creating a more welcoming environment for pedestrians and shoppers and encouraging investment into this part of the town centre. In Bishop's Stortford, plans for the Northgate End development have been approved, which will create a residential and commercial block, along with a much-needed multi-storey car park. This redevelopment will free up and transform the land in the heart of Bishop's Stortford at Old River Lane for cultural, residential and business use, including a new arts centre with a 500 seat theatre, four cinema screens and café/bar. Detailed masterplanning, involving residents and stakeholders, will take place later this year.

We recognise the work our small businesses do in creating vibrant town centres and a flourishing rural economy, and we are committed to supporting their work. This year we have helped the Bishop's Stortford Business Improvement District (BID) set themselves up. The BID will focus on improving the public realm, creating a better trading environment and supporting the local economy. We have continued to operate the Launchpad at Bishop's Stortford, which has been used by over 100 local businesses and individuals this year. Our Discretionary Business Rates Relief scheme has provided financial support to over 25 small businesses either in their first year of trading, or looking to expand within the district. Over the last three years we have successfully managed the European Funded Rural Development Programme, working in partnership with councils across the Eastern region. The programme has supported 8 rural businesses across the district to deliver initiatives such as farm diversification, tourism, and cultural and heritage activity through accessing match funding.

This year we will say goodbye to our outgoing Chief Executive, Liz Watts, whose motivation and determination have transformed our ways of working. We look forward to welcoming our new Chief Executive, Richard Cassidy, who brings with him a wealth of local government experience, having worked for over 30 years at councils in London and across the Eastern region. The Council carries out a huge variety of work, and this report provides just a brief overview of our successes over the past year. We recognise and value the contributions of all our colleagues, councillors and partners.

Cllr Linda Haysey
Leader

Some quotes from our customers:

"Can you please pass on our appreciation for another year's excellent service to the refuse collectors who cope with all sorts of weathers and difficult situations. Also to all the background people who we don't see but help make the service work"

"You have all been fantastic and always have been there for me even when I have had a silly simple question or some advice."

On Hertford Theatre: "We're fortunate to have such an excellent small theatre on our doorstep. We come here as often as we can to see some enjoyable performances at extremely reasonable prices."

"I would like to say that I am very impressed with the website presentation of information under the Local Government Transparency Code and detail regarding the attendance of Councillors at meetings."

"I have moved into my new home and we are very happy. I just wanted to thank the Housing Options Team for being so helpful."



The following highlights some of our successes within each of our corporate theme areas:

PRIORITY 1: Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities

We have started planning for our leisure centres – a completely new centre at Grange Paddocks in Bishop's Stortford and the refurbishment of Hartham in Hertford and Ward Freman in Buntingford.

Our Social Prescribing scheme has received over 200 referrals, providing support for those affected by isolation and mild depression in the district.

Our new Community Transport Strategy was agreed in December 2018, recognising the challenges that accessing appropriate transport for essential and social journeys is challenging for many people in the district.

The sports schemes and activities set up through our Forever Active programme have been supported to become self-sustaining.

PRIORITY 2: Enhancing the quality of people's lives

Our District Plan was adopted in October 2018, identifying how East Herts will grow and develop to become an even more desirable and prosperous place to live, work and visit.

The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy was adopted by the Council in March 2019, setting out our intentions to sustain tenancies and protect and increase local housing options.

We have carried out extensive improvements on The Wash, Bull Plain and Maidenhead Street in Hertford.

In Bishop's Stortford, plans for the Northgate End development have been approved, which will create a residential and commercial block, along with a much-needed multi-storey car park, and free up the land at Old River Lane for transformation.

PRIORITY 3: Enabling a flourishing economy

We have supported the Bishop's Stortford Business Improvement District (BID) to set themselves up. The BID will focus on improving the public realm, creating a better trading environment and supporting the local economy.

We have provided support to 20 small businesses through our Business Rates Discretionary Relief Scheme.

The Bishop's Stortford Launchpad, providing serviced office space to enable start up enterprise, has been used by over 100 business and individuals.

A note from the Chief Executive

East Herts has pursued its ambitious and forward-thinking goals this year, working to ensure that the district remains one of the best places in the country to live and work.

We want East Herts residents to continue to thrive, by staying as healthy as possible and receiving support when it is needed. This year we have developed a Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which sets out how we will work with others to help our residents to make healthy choices and live independently for as long as possible. We are determined to make the most of our open spaces and leisure facilities to achieve these aims. We have improved the play areas at Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford and Hillside Crescent in Stanstead Abbots and created connections between our open spaces, focussing on Hertford and the surrounding areas. We have started planning for our leisure centres – a completely new centre at Grange Paddocks in Bishop's Stortford and the refurbishment of Hartham in Hertford and Ward Freman in Buntingford - and we have been talking to local residents about our plans for improvements to Hartham Common which will be made over the coming year.

Our bid for Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery funding for Castle Gardens Park in Bishop's Stortford was successful – we have been awarded nearly £2m to combine Castle Gardens, owned by East Herts Council, and Sworders Field, owned by Bishop's Stortford Town Council, into one beautiful green space – Castle Park. We have established a Friends Group to ensure that local community groups and residents are involved in the park's development.

In partnership with Hertfordshire County Council and our residents, we have worked to improve air quality and reduce the levels of pollution across the district. Air pollution in three key areas has dropped in the past five years - Gascoyne Way in Hertford, Hockerill junction in Bishop's Stortford, and Stansted Road. We recognise that we still have more to do to ensure that all areas of the district meet national targets. To further improve we have introduced an e-car club with Council staff, before rolling out the scheme to residents in Hertford and Bishop's Stortford. Residents can also sign up to our new air alert service, which gives an alert when air quality is poor.

We are committed to supporting our most vulnerable residents when they need our help. This year we have developed a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which will guide the ways in which we act swiftly to prevent the loss of accommodation, sustain tenancies and protect and increase local housing options. We have successfully introduced the use of 'Personal Housing Plans' for residents at risk of homelessness. The East Herts Social Prescribing Service for residents who are feeling lonely, isolated or living with mild depression and anxiety, launched in January 2018. The service has so far received over 200 referrals from GPs and other health professionals. Residents referred to the service are supported to join a range of local social and activity groups – and the majority of those attending say they are feeling better about their general wellbeing and happiness.

We recognise that many of our residents have busy lives and prefer to contact us online, and the digital transformation of Council services continues apace. Many services can now be accessed using online forms which has made most transactions significantly quicker and easier. We understand that some of our residents need to call us or come in to see us, and will continue to ensure that Council services are accessible to everyone.

In December 2018 we undertook a Peer Challenge, managed by the Local Government Association. This was a useful and informative process which recognised that East Herts is a high performing and well-respected Council, with a strong leadership team to push forward its ambitious targets.

This year I will be leaving East Herts after three and a half years as Chief Executive. The Council has many exciting ventures to look forward to, and dedicated and resourceful colleagues to drive them forward. It has been a privilege to work here and I am incredibly proud of what we have collectively achieved.

Liz Watts
Chief Executive

At the end of March 2019 the Council had

9,387
followers

1,526
followers

1,205
users

566
followers